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At the beginning of the 1973-74 academic year alcohol usage was officially permitted for the first time in residence halls at the Twin Cities Campus of the University of Minnesota. To determine residents' perceptions of the effects of the change in drinking policy, interviews were conducted with 49 current dormitory residents, who had also lived in a U of M resident hall during the year prior to the new policy. Interviewees were randomly selected from each residence hall in numbers proportionate to the total number of residents in each hall. Key findings of the survey include: 84 percent of those interviewed expressed general satisfaction with the new policy, and 82 percent felt that it respected the rights of both drinkers and nondrinkers. Fifty-three percent of the interviewees felt that the change in official policy had not altered the amount of drinking that had occurred before drinking was officially permitted. No respondents felt that the policy change had adversely affected their grades, and 92 percent reported no effect on their management of study time. Seventy-four percent felt that the policy had not significantly changed the social atmosphere in the residence halls, although 52 percent reported that the number of floor-lounge parties had increased from the previous years. (Author)

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RESIDENCE HALL STUDENT SATISFACTION WITH INTERIM ALCOHOL POLICY

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At the beginning of the 1973-74 academic year alcohol usage was officially permitted for the first time in residence halls at the Twin Cities Campus of the University of Minnesota. To determine residents' perceptions of the effects of the change in drinking policy, interviews were conducted with 49 current dormitory residents, who had also lived in a U of M residence hall during the year prior to the new policy. Interviewees were randomly selected from each residence hall in numbers proportionate to the total number of residents in each hall. Key findings of the survey include: eighty-four percent of those interviewed expressed general satisfaction with the new policy, and 82% felt that it respected the rights of both drinkers and non-drinkers. Fifty-three percent of the interviewees felt that the change in official policy had not altered the amount of drinking which had occurred before drinking was officially permitted. No respondents felt that the policy change had adversely affected their grades, and 92% reported no effect on their management of study time. Seventy-four percent felt that the policy had not significantly changed the social atmosphere in the residence halls, although 52% reported that the number of floor-lounge parties had increased from the previous year.

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In June of 1973, a Minnesota law went into effect changing the age of legal adulthood from 21 to 18 years. Thus Minnesota joined about one-half of the rest of the states in a trend toward lowering the age of majority. The change in the legal definition of adulthood has several implications for higher education (Ross, 1974). Institutional policies which previously considered college students to be adolescents are now being changed to recognize the new adult status of the student.

At the University of Minnesota one of the first policies to reflect this status change was that prohibiting the consumption of alcoholic beverages on campus. On August 10, 1973, the Regents of the University of Minnesota passed the "Interim University Policy on Use and Possession of Alcoholic Beverages in Residence Halls." Previous policy prohibited alcohol consumption in all campus locations. This revised position on student alcohol use permitted possession and consumption of alcoholic beverages within the residence halls but not in other campus locations. Within each hall, residents were offered the following options in living arrangements: 1) living in an area where possession and consumption are permitted; 2) living with a roommate who does not choose to possess and consume alcoholic beverages but in an area where possession is allowed; or 3) residing in an area of the hall where possession and consumption of alcohol is not permitted. On February 8, 1974, a second document, "Policy on Alcoholic Beverages," was approved, allowing the president of the University to dictate where and on which occasions alcoholic beverages would be permitted on campus.

The present study was an evaluation of the interim residence hall policy. Its purpose was to examine residents' perception of the policy's effects on the general quality of life in the residence halls. More specifically, the following issues were addressed: the policy's effects on floor-lounge parties and private social gatherings; the effect on affected residents' alcohol consumption; effects on noise levels; differences between areas where alcohol is permitted and those areas where it is not allowed; and general satisfaction with the policy.

METHOD

A desirable method for evaluating the revised alcohol policy would have been to have collected data from a large number of respondents before and after the institution of the policy in question. In lieu of this procedure, a small group of persons who had resided in a hall both before and after the policy went into effect were interviewed to obtain their perceptions and opinions on the effects of the policy. The sample size of 49 persons is not adequate to justify generalization to all dormitory residents. However, because of the interim nature of the policy under exploration, an in-depth examination of a few students' opinions was judged to have a higher cost/benefit ratio than a more extensive survey.

Survey Items

Survey items were developed during the period of February 5 to March 25, 1974, in meetings between staff of Student Life Studies and Housing offices of the University of Minnesota. Item selection was based on staff understanding of the relevant issues, technical quality, and length limitations of a fifteen to twenty minute interview. The selected items were pretested in personal interviews by a graduate research assistant on March 20, 1974.

Conduct of the Survey

The survey was conducted by personal interview, with the option of a telephone interview for those respondents who so desired. During the period of April 4 to

May 2, 1974, three graduate research assistants called students in the sample to set a time for the interview, or if the respondent preferred, conducted an on-the-spot telephone interview.

Sample and Response Rate

Forty-nine dormitory residents from the Twin Cities Campus of the University of Minnesota were interviewed. The sample was generated from lists of persons who had lived in the same residence hall for at least two years, those years being immediately before and after the institution of the interim alcohol policy, in order that the persons interviewed could report differences between pre- and post-policy institution.

Sample size was determined according to a ratio of one interview per 75 hall residents. Names were randomly selected from each hall list of returned residents in numbers proportionate to that hall's population. Thus there were four interviews from Bailey Hall, seven from Centennial, seven from Comstock, five from Frontier, eight from Middelbrook, seven from Pioneer, six from Sanford, and five from Territorial. Twenty-seven men and 22 women were interviewed. Twice as many names as interviews needed were chosen to allow for those persons who no longer were living in the residence hall, did not wish to be interviewed, or could not be reached.

By May 2, 1974, the 49 interviews were completed.

RESULTS

Social Atmosphere

Responding to a general question on the social effects of the policy, 74% of the respondents said that the institution of the interim policy had made no meaningful changes in the social atmosphere in the residence halls. Twenty-four percent thought that it had improved somewhat and 2% of the respondents found that the dormitory's social atmosphere had become less satisfactory.

According to 52% of the respondents the number of floor-lounge parties increased over the year before, while 9% saw a decrease. Forty-eight percent thought the attendance at these organized floor parties had increased and another 36% said there had been no change from the previous year. Seventy-one percent of the students said

they would be comfortable bringing a date to these parties and only a very few persons reported obnoxious drunks to be more than a slight problem. There were no differences in the number of hall residents met at these parties for 50% of the sample, 28% met more, and 20% met fewer persons at parties under the new policy. The quality of the floor-lounge parties deteriorated as a result of the interim alcohol policy according to 9% of the interviewees. In contrast, 46% said the parties had improved, commenting that there was no longer the fear of getting caught, that people were more relaxed and friendly, and that the parties lasted longer because people no longer split up into private rooms to sneak a drink. Twenty-five percent of the respondents could not compare the parties of before and after the institution of the interim policy, and 30% of the interviewees reported they never attended these parties.

When asked if they had small group social gatherings in their rooms more or less often than the year before, 49% said there had been no change, while 41% said these gatherings occurred more often. Sixty percent of the students reported no change in the frequency with which they served alcoholic beverages to their guests, while 30% reported an increase.

It was considered a possibility that the new alcohol policy might affect student comfort in bringing non-resident friends into the hall. Eighty-two percent said the policy made no difference and two percent felt less comfortable.

Thirty-three percent of the students interviewed were of the opinion that the total amount of alcohol consumed by the general dorm population had increased under the new policy, whereas 53% thought there had been no change. Four percent said the amount had decreased and ten percent ventured no opinion. In contrast, when students were asked how the policy had affected their personal drinking habits, 71% said there had been no effect, 20% reported drinking more, and eight percent drank less. Over half (57%) of the respondents said that the possession of alcohol in the residence halls was no more exciting and glamorous before it was officially

permitted than after. Thirty-five percent did perceive this "forbidden fruit" effect as occurring, however.

A majority of the interviewees felt they simply could not answer when asked to compare the incidence of other drug usage under the different policy conditions. Fourteen percent said marijuana smoking had increased, six percent said that it had decreased, and 29% said that there was no change. Fifty-one percent reported that they were unable to assess changes in marijuana usage. Other non-prescribed drug use appears to be less evident as two percent reported an increase and another two percent reported a decrease from the level of the previous year. Eighteen percent thought there had been no change and 78% simply did not know.

Study Atmosphere

Sixty-nine percent of the students interviewed reported spending similar or greater amounts of study time in the hall as compared to the year before, and most of those who spend less time studying in the hall offered a reason unrelated to the alcohol policy. No one thought the policy had had an adverse effect on their grades and 94% said the policy had no effect at all. Likewise, the interim policy was not seen as affecting the management of study time of 92% of the respondents, although six percent did find it harder to study, unanimously citing noisy neighbors as the problem.

Noise levels in the dorms during the week have not changed according to 80% of the interviewees, although sixteen percent said their hall was noisier. However, there does appear to be some effect on weekends with 37% saying the noise level has been raised over the previous year. Sixty percent of the respondents thought there was no difference in noise level between designated drinking and non-drinking areas, but 34% felt that the drinking areas were noisier.

General Satisfaction

Responding to a question concerning general satisfaction of the policy, 84% of

the students were satisfied with the interim alcohol policy and 82% felt that it was working effectively to guarantee the rights of both drinkers and non-drinkers. The fact that the policy allows a choice of living options was most frequently suggested as the reason for the policy's success. There was almost unanimous agreement (98%) that the policy would be of minor or no importance in a decision to stay in or move out of the residence hall for the next year.

Seventy-six percent of the respondents would not consider moving from a drinking to non-drinking area or vice versa, most often saying they wanted the freedom to drink whether or not they used that freedom. The 21% of the respondents who said they would consider moving often remarked that there was not that much difference in the two areas, either in type of resident or in drinking practices. When asked if it would be better for non-drinkers to be in a distinctly separate area or randomly mixed within the drinking rooms, 35% of the students opted for the separate areas for drinkers and non-drinkers, 43% preferred random mixing, and 22% thought the individual should have a choice of the two alternatives. Related to the issue, 98% of the sample felt that the location of their rooms did not create any pressure to drink more or less than they might otherwise want to.

In spite of there officially being a new policy, 55% of the students interviewed said there had been no noticeable difference in the practices of the residence hall staff regarding alcohol use by the residents. Those 43% who noticed a definite change often mentioned that the staff no longer had to be on the lookout for alcohol use. The Resident Advisor's job was perceived to have been made easier by 60% of the interviewees, who suggested that the RA was relieved of the responsibility of enforcing an unfavorable policy and would also be able to mix more easily with students, being able to associate at parties without compromising his or her duties. Twenty-six percent saw the RA's job as getting harder with the institution of the interim alcohol policy as it demanded greater responsibilities in view of more possible damages and more complaints because of the noise.

The question of whether or not there was in fact a noticable difference in the use of alcohol by the dormitory residents obtained well divided responses. Fifty-three percent said there was no difference while 43% said that there was a noticeable difference, examples being increased use, more social life, and drinking more for social purposes without the prime intent of getting drunk.

When given the opportunity to suggest changes in the interim policy, the majority of students indicated they were satisfied as is and could not see possibilities for improvement. The most often suggested change involved expansion of the policy to the entire campus, especially to the student unions and to other more public areas of the residence halls such as dining rooms.

DISCUSSION

Overall, the sample of students who have lived in University of Minnesota residence halls with the without official permission to possess and consume alcoholic beverages in the halls saw no great changes for either better or worse as a result of the interim alcohol policy.

The greatest perceived difference attributable to the policy appears to be in the social atmosphere in the halls. Respondents felt that the number of floor-lounge parties had increased with the institution of the interim alcohol policy; students who attended generally reported being satisfied with the quality of these parties.

The effects of alcohol as a facilitator of socialization is questionable as half of the respondents reported no change in the number of persons met at the floor-lounge parties and about a quarter each reported increases and decreases. However, nearly one-third of the interviewees said they never attended these parties and often indicated that they therefore could not evaluate them. Those persons who did not attend the parties may have stayed away because of dissatisfaction with their quality. Thus those who were dissatisfied with the floor-lounge parties may be under-represented in the evaluations.

Several students commented that the changed policy made no difference in drinking in the residence halls--that all it did was legalize what was already happening. A majority of respondents reported no changes in the frequency with which they served alcoholic beverages to guests, the amount of alcohol consumed personally, or the amount of alcohol consumed by the general dorm population. Student opinions did not support a "forbidden fruit" effect whereby drinking would be glamorous and exciting while illegal, but once officially permitted would lose this aura of adventure and therefore decrease. Over half of the interviewees saw no such aura about unsanctioned drinking in the residence halls, and only four percent reported a decrease in drinking for the general dormitory population and eight percent reported a decrease for themselves.

Most respondents felt that the revised alcohol policy had little effect on the study atmosphere in the residence halls. The majority of students did not have to leave their rooms to do their studying and the newly installed freedom of the policy had little effect on their study habits. However, it must be considered that the students interviewed had already had at least a year to establish their study habits. The study habits of incoming freshmen may be more susceptible to disruption.

Responses to the general satisfaction questions should be considered in view of the possibility that the sample consisted of persons who were sufficiently satisfied with life in the residence halls to have signed contracts to return prior to the approval of the interim alcohol policy. Thus the policy change may have had little effect on their decision to return to the hall. In the absence of drastic changes in dormitory life due to the policy, their relatively high level of satisfaction would probably not be expected to change, possibly accounting for the reported low importance of the policy on future decisions to leave or return to the hall.

In sum, the respondents appear to be satisfied with the "Interim University Policy on Use and Possession of Alcoholic Beverages in Residence Halls," and see it was working fairly and effectively. Their comments included remarks that the residents who have taken advantage of the alcohol policy have been quite responsible; that it is a good change but it did not affect what actually went on; and that the policy makes dorm life much more appealing.

REFERENCES

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"Policy on Alcoholic Beverages." University of Minnesota, February 8, 1974.

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Copies of the interview form and response percentages for each item are available upon request from Student Life Studies, 327 Walter Library, University of Minnesota.